



September 4, 2009

Tompkins County economic activity index falls in July

The Index of Economic Activity in Tompkins County fell by 0.4 percent in July to a level of 151.00 from a revised mark of 151.60 in June. Air traffic and help wanted advertising showed strength. Retail sales improved modestly, while employment, building permits, and home sales were weak. Comparing this past July to July 2008, economic activity was down 0.4 percent.

The employment sector of the Index dipped 1.8 percent in July. The number of jobs in Tompkins County fell by 1,200 to 63,100 on a seasonally adjusted basis. The unemployment rate was 6.3 percent. The unemployment rate has never been this high in Tompkins County except for June 2009, when it was 6.7 percent. The unemployment rate in New York State was 8.6 percent in July, compared to 9.7 percent nationally.

Retail sales in Tompkins County increased 2.3 percent in July, but this is compared to a poor showing in June. The volume of retail sales was down 5.8 percent from last year's level. The retail sector of the economy has shed 200 jobs since July 2008.

The number of passengers landing and taking off from Ithaca Tompkins Regional Airport rose 8.9 percent in July and was up 35.5 percent over last year's level. Air traffic has been resilient throughout the recession. People are saying ticket prices out of Ithaca have become more competitive.

Residential building permits issued in Tompkins County crumbled 68.8 percent in July. Building permits have a tendency to swing widely from month to month. Compared to July 2008, building permits were down 75 percent.

Sales of existing homes in Tompkins County are estimated to have slipped 2 percent in July on a seasonally adjusted basis. Home sales and prices fallen moderately during the recession in Tompkins County.

Help wanted advertising jumped 29 percent in July. This indicator of future employment has shown some vigor in the past two months.

Keep in mind that the county economy was in a recession last year at this time. Even so, the current figures don't look all that much better and there is scant evidence that we have turned the corner.
